



*"Drastic changes in climate patterns have affected the lives of women farmers in Tapi over the last few years. While untimely rainfalls have adversely affected the crop output, rising temperatures have made it increasingly difficult for us to work in the fields for long hours."*

- Lataben,  
President, Megha Tribal Women Farmers' Agriculture  
Cooperative

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Hello,

Welcome to Sahakarita - SEWA Cooperative Federation's bi-monthly digital publication. We work as a Women's Enterprise Support System, promoting and supporting grassroot women's enterprises. Through this newsletter we bring to you our work, stories of our grassroots women's collective enterprises, their needs and their contribution to the economy.

With the summer months touching temperatures that they have never before in the past, climate change is no longer a thing of the future. For agriculture workers like Lataben, it alters their lives every day. In our first volume, we try to explore the effect of the climate crisis on informal women workers and the role of women's collective enterprises in its mitigation.

We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed putting this together!

If you would like to support or partner with us, do get in touch. And if you found this volume valuable, please share it on social media.



“Women’s grassroots collective enterprises are creating economies based on needs and care, not greed; on cooperation, not competition; on diversity, not uniformity, on de-centralisation, not centralisation. These are the economies of the future.”

-Vandana Shiva

We had a conversation with environmental activist and thinker **Dr. Vandana Shiva** on women’s collectives and climate action.

Awarded with the Right Livelihood Award or the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' in 1993, Dr Shiva has extensively worked towards de-corporatizing agriculture, restoring food sovereignty and promoting a traditional seed culture through Navdanya, a movement for protecting biological and cultural diversity.

**Q: What role can grassroots women's collective enterprises play in the mitigation of the climate disaster?**

**Dr. Shiva:** The climate, health, inequality, poverty and hunger crises have their roots in corporate greed, profits and control. 10 billionaires now own more wealth than 40% of humanity. This is inhuman, not sustainable and unjust. Women’s grassroots collective enterprises are creating economies based on needs and care, not greed, on cooperation, not competition, on diversity, not uniformity and monocultures, on self determination, not external control, on decentralisation, not centralisation.

When true costs and true benefits are taken into account, women’s grassroots collective enterprises produce more while regenerating the earth and enhancing women’s potential. These are the economies of the future.

**Q: You often talk about how women have the potential to lead the transition to regenerate the Earth and how their natural instinct for farming is that of growing food for health and not disease. Why do you say this?**

**Dr. Shiva:** I do not refer to natural instincts. I am not an essentialist. Women have knowledge and skills for

caring for the earth, the soil, the children because they were left to care for the basis of life, and care work was not considered work. The care economy was not considered an economy. Women’s work and knowledge was not counted. But the care economy is the foundation of all economies.

The transition to regenerate the earth needs women’s experience, knowledge, skills, values, worldviews. This includes the recognition that we are part of the earth, not separate from her. What we do to the earth, we do to ourselves. When we grow food with care for the earth and community, we grow healthy food. The health of the planet and our health is one health.

**Q: Crises of any kind, including the climate crises, affect the marginalized more than anyone. It is often the economically disadvantaged, informal women workers that are the worst affected. We saw this during COVID-19. How can we be better prepared and make sure that we don't leave anyone behind?**

**Dr. Shiva:** Climate resilience has both ecological and social dimensions. Uniform, long distance, centralised systems are more vulnerable to climate breakdown. Diverse, localised, decentralised systems bounce back more easily.

Women bear the heaviest burden when climate disasters

strike. But women also carry the knowledge and practices that create resilient systems. Women are central actors in responding to climate change. They should be climate action leaders.

**Q: What is Ecofeminism and how is it the future according to you?**

**Dr. Shiva:** Ecofeminism is the recognition that the

Earth and women are creative and intelligent. Capitalist patriarchy created the illusions that nature is dead, raw materials are to be exploited and property to be owned. That women are passive, objects to be owned and manipulated. Capitalist patriarchy has unleashed ecocide and femicide. The non-violent creative partnership of women and nature can help humanity avert ecological collapse and extinction.



## Climate Action : Why & How To Make It More Equitable ?

An article by Ayushiben & Shreeshaben  
SEWA Cooperative Federation

Girls and women are at higher risk of food insecurity, are more likely to die in extreme weather events, and are more likely to experience mental health impacts caused by climate change than boys and men (IPCC, February 2022).

The intersection between environmental issues and social issues is ubiquitous, yet it is often overlooked. Women are more closely associated with the environment for resource collection and management, like water and food. To ensure climate justice, it is critical to consider social justice, as both are interconnected. In Anubandh - Building 100-mile Communities, Elaben Bhatt says, “Change, to be real, has to come from the people; it cannot be trickled down, it cannot be imported, it cannot be imposed.”

With increasing issues around health and livelihood emerging due to extreme weather conditions, informal women workers in urban and rural areas are impacted the most.

Informal women workers are also burdened with increased care work in addition to their work. Whether they are domestic workers or artisans working in enclosed spaces or street vendors and farmers working outdoors, climate change impacts their health and livelihood.

*“I take work to my fellow cooperative members, women artisans so that they can work from home. It saves them time and money. In these last few months, many of them have been declining work. Their housing conditions are poor. Some of them live in houses with tin roofs. It becomes too hot for them to stay indoors and work. They are unable to work full hours staying indoors due to the increasing heat. Now they are taking up work as domestic workers within the neighbourhood, as they need the money for sustenance.”*

*“Along with work that I do at Megha, I continue to work on our fields in my village, Chichbardi. Given the increasing heat, it is difficult to work on the fields later in the day. But I still have all the farm work to finish, so I wake up earlier in the morning, to avoid the extreme afternoon heat. When I come back, I also finish all the household work.”*

Sangitaben, a farmer and board member of Megha Tribal Women Farmers' Cooperative



Heenaben, artisan and board member of Abodana Handicraft Cooperative

With tacit knowledge about climate resilience and ways of maintaining efficiency in sustaining livelihoods, these women workers' approach to their trade/work is intuitively sustainable in nature, however women are under-represented in

decision making roles. Despite the unequivocal value of women's participation in climate movements and their history as environmental defenders, men still fill 67 per cent of climate-related decision-making roles and women's representation in national and global climate negotiating bodies remains below 30 per cent.

When the impact of the crisis varies depending on the state, geographical region and socio-political status, so should the climate action plans. This is where the 'Cooperative Model' comes in. Cooperatives act for a

better, more inclusive, more sustainable, more participative, and more prosperous future for all. The women-owned cooperative movement is based on an intense collaboration of common understanding and mutual respect. Their voice and representation will ensure not just inclusive policy design, but since they lead on-ground efforts, it will also ensure efficient and effective implementation.



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### The Pigeon Pea Project

A women cooperative's tryst with technology



*"When we finally managed to process the pigeon peas (toor dal) for the first time as we had planned, we realised that we could achieve whatever we aimed for"* says Sangitaben, a board member at Megha Tribal Women Farmers' Cooperative in Tapi, South Gujarat.

Established in 2014, Megha Tribal Women Farmers' Cooperative in South Gujarat brings together small, marginalised tribal women farmers from the region into a platform that provides a means to address common livelihood needs and more. Over the years, Megha has addressed concerns of access to social security - healthcare, insurance and childcare, sustainable livelihood opportunities, and capacity building

trainings to promote organic farming in the area. As the need arose, they have been working to make good quality, low-cost seeds and agriculture equipment accessible and during COVID worked extensively to get reliable health information and access to health kits and medicines to remote villages in their region.

While some of these services, like training, have brought the cooperative some income, it was never enough to be sustainable. As Sangitaben puts it, *"Selling and making profits was never prioritised."* But over the years, the cooperative has come to realise that they must grow and become viable, if they want to sustain their work. The cooperative model ensures that when a business is

profitable, it benefits not only the business but also women-worker-shareholders. In the last year, the board members of Megha Cooperative decided to shift their focus along with community activities to business activities to ensure an increased income for the cooperative and for its members. One of the shifts in strategy was to get into the in-house processing of their produce, as processed lentils and seeds fetch a higher price in the market. They decided to test this out with processing locally grown pigeon peas. In-house processing meant that they had to source the equipment and train themselves to use the processing machine. This would not only reduce their overall cost but also increase their profit margin.

There is enough evidence about the huge disparity when it comes to women's farmers' access to catalytic technology that can increase efficiency and offer them access to a higher price in the market. Take digital technology for instance which plays a key role to help farmers get the produce to the market- Indian women are 15 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone, and 33

per cent less likely to use mobile internet services than men. For the women at Megha, processing in-house was a challenging task, considering the socio-cultural gender norms and women's access to processing technology. Recalling her experience of trying to process the first batch of peas, Sangitaben says, *"There was fear. When we first started using it, we used to turn it off as soon as it made any noise. We were extremely afraid of ruining such an expensive machine."*

It took some time before these women farmers gained the confidence to work the machine on their own. In the last season alone, Megha Agriculture Cooperative has processed close to two thousand kilograms of pigeon peas, with the women farmers themselves processing the produce. Currently, Sangitaben and her colleagues are busy selling off the pigeon peas. In this past year, they befriended technology, took a step towards sustainability by switching from plastic packaging to brown paper packaging, entered a new urban market and most of all have learnt that nothing is impossible for a collective of women farmers.



Left & Right : Women farmers and shareholders of Megha Cooperative



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SEWA Lok Swasthya Health Cooperative, a women-owned women-run enterprise that manufactures Ayurvedic products including a range of haircare, skin care and immunity builders have started selling their products online on Amazon. Made with natural ingredients and a whole lot of love - you can now place your orders for their herbal oil, aloe vera shampoo, face pack and other products [here](#).

By shopping for these products, you not only get good quality Ayurvedic health products that nourish you, but you also support an enterprise with women workers at every stage of production.

## From the Archives



“ This was a meeting of our midwives cooperative. Dayanbehno (traditional birth attendants) have had a long history in India. When we were trying to establish their cooperative, the women themselves did not realise their value in society. They used to say, 'What's so special about us? We just deliver babies.' Through SEWA Cooperative Federation, we gave them training under Dr Renukaben and got them certified as “barefoot doctors”. Much before the ASHA worker model, our dayanbehno used to help low income families avail benefits from government schemes, help them with registrations and assist the government with census data collection, apart from providing their traditional services as midwives. As the demand for traditional birth attendants declined, the cooperative slipped into oblivion. ”

-Jayaben

SEWA Cooperative Federation

## Bulletin Board

- On 28th April 2022, SEWA Cooperative Federation Chairperson, Mirai Chatterjee spoke about *Why Child Care Matters?* at a webinar jointly hosted by United States Agency For International Development (USAID), White House Gender Policy Council and National Security Council on *Incentivising Investments in Global Child Care Infrastructure*. The opening remarks for the webinar were made by First Lady Dr Jill Biden. Melinda French Gates, USAID administrator Samantha Power and Mari Elka Pangestu, Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnerships World Bank also spoke at the webinar.
- Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust, one of our member cooperatives, has bagged the Prince Talal International Prize For Human Development 2021 under the topic Climate Action SDG13. A prize of \$300,000 USD has been awarded to MHT for their project titled *Women's Action Towards Climate Resilience Of Urban Poor In South Asia*. Big congratulations to the whole team!
- A chapter authored by Salonie Muralidhara (Senior Coordinator, SEWA Federation) on Informal Workers Harnessing The Power Of Digital Platforms In India was published as a chapter in a book titled Social Contracts And Informal Workers In The Global South, published by WIEGO. You can read it [here](#).
- Palak Gadhiya (Research Manager, SEWA Cooperative Federation) presented SEWA Cooperative Federation's work at a webinar conducted by National Cooperative Union Of India on 6th June, 2022 on Cooperative Universities.

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